

EDUCATION AT MARY IMMACULATE PARISH, ANNERLEY

4 October 2011

Brian Matthews

In October 1912 three acres of land on the highest point on Ipswich Road, at the corner of Ferndale Street, were purchased for £814, when James Duhig came to Brisbane as Coadjutor Archbishop. He also purchased three acres at Coorparoo and excised the district from Kangaroo Point Parish, into the care of Fr Jeremiah O'Leary.

In July 1913 at a meeting in the Junction Hall, 434 Annerley Road, the erection of a church-school was given full support. The Foundation Block of the church was laid in September 1913, and the building was blessed and opened in July 1914. In 1916 Father James Gallagher was appointed as the first resident priest of Annerley and in that same year a house on the corner of Taunton Street was purchased for use as a Presbytery.

Also in 1916, *St Elmo*, a house on the opposite side of Ipswich Road was purchased to be used as a convent. A chapel was built into the front parlour of the residence. Mass was celebrated there on week-days for the sisters. I was altar-boy there on countless occasions.

Both buildings were blessed and dedicated in February 1917 by Archbishop Mannix of Melbourne, who was in Brisbane for the Month's Mind of Archbishop Dunne. School classes were conducted in the church from 30th April 1917 by the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

RSCJ Founding Group:

In 1917

Mothers:

Gabrielle Renard	Superior
Mary Eileen Power	In Charge of School
Kathleen O'Donovan	Classes in School
Anne Dignam	Classes in School
Mary Jane Beirne	Classes in School

Sister

Josephine Hallinan	Cook and House Duties
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In 1918

Mothers came as:

Mary Zahel	Bursar and Painting Classes
Joan Percy-Dove	Classes in School

I have a photo of the founding Sisters of Stuartholme, which includes Mother Zahel. Her details are:-

Zahel, Mary Philippine (Aust)

Parents:	Vincent Zahel and Bridget Watson
Birth:	1.5.1865 St Leonards, Sydney.
Clothing:	2.10.1888 Rose Bay
First Vows:	13.11.1890 Roehampton UK
Professed:	2.7.1896 Rose Bay
Death and Burial:	6.12.1946 Stuartholme

Artistic, but self-taught, Mother Zahel did fresco work in Timaru in NZ & Glen Iris Vic. which give much devotion. I am advised that there are two other Mother Zahel paintings in the Rosalie Parish Church.

While in the Parish school, Mother Mary Zahel painted a life-size picture of Mary Immaculate using as her model for the face, one of the school children, Rita de Lange, the daughter of the chairman of the original building committee.

That rectangular picture was hung in the wooden church and was taken to the brick church when it opened in 1932. The top was cut into an arch to fit the arches of the sanctuary in the brick church. It had pride of place behind the altar until the High Altar was built in 1941. That painting was then stored in the room behind the choir loft in the church for many years, before being hung in the brick school. The painting has recently been taken to the Mary MacKillop Centre at Annerley in the care of the Sisters of St Joseph.

In November 1988, Sr Genevieve Carroll rsj, the Principal of Mary Immaculate School—in response to her request—received a letter from the Archives Office, Convent of the Sacred Heart, Rose Bay, enclosing some extracts from the early Community Journal of the Convent at Ipswich Road and the foregoing names of the founding community. I was privileged to read an earlier copy of those extracts about 18 years ago.

There is also an unsigned handwritten note:-

Mother Zahel once spoke to us of the time she took to paint the Immaculate Conception. We were a class of three to whom she was giving drawing lessons in the afternoon after school on two days a week...She said the painting took her one week to complete in the time she had to devote to it. I understood that she passed by it on her way to the door and back again—she was acting as Portress at the time, and she was able to add a few brush strokes each time she passed.

Singing lessons were conducted in the school by Mrs Wheeler and on Trinity Sunday 1919, Miss Molly Wheeler, her daughter and Brisbane's Prima Donna who understudied Nellie Melba, travelled from Toowoomba to sing in our church. Her beautiful rendition of the 'Ave Maria' at Benediction and her leading of the school children's choir during Mass is recorded in the Journal of the Sacred Heart Sisters.

Molly Wheeler joined the RSCJ in June 1920. Her brother, Vincent, was ordained a priest for our diocese. Her sister, Vera, joined the Sisters at Stuartholme as a lay sister after the death of their parents for whom she cared in their old age.

The Sacred Heart Sisters left in January 1920. Their boarders were about to arrive from the country and Stuartholme was due to open at Bardon for the school year. It was anticipated that the Good Samaritan Sisters would take over, but they couldn't arrive before Easter. Fortunately for the Parish, the Sisters of Saint Joseph were able to come without delay. They arrived late in the afternoon, were shown around their new home—then the first sisters were driven to Stuartholme.

Classrooms were built-in under the church and those classrooms were in use until 1955 when the new two-storey brick school was opened between the original wooden church and the 1932 brick church. The first church building for the parish occupied the site where the Marymac Centre now stands. The convent was on the city side of that building. The two buildings were joined by a wooden bridge so that the sisters could proceed to the veranda of the church at floor level without having to walk in the open, over broken ground.

I have looked at the School Archives; there are two Registers from about 1929 to about 1948. My family registration numbers are: The twins, Joseph 1313 & Mary 1314; Brian 1460; Terence 1583; Denis 1868. The Registers showed street names but no house numbers; numbering of houses came after the war. The name of the male parent

predominated; his occupation and sometimes his place of employment is shown.

Promotion of the child through the grades shows a clear indication that in the 1930s we had our own early form of pre-school. In my time we had two years in the 'Prep' classes—six months each in P1, P2, P3, P4, before we were recorded as going into Grade 1. The yearly promotion was then recorded into grades 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

In 1942, the entry for promotion into the next grade was not recorded until March. This was in the early days of the War in the Pacific and most Queensland schools were months late in starting their year. As a Japanese invasion was imminent, air raid shelters and/or trenches had to be prepared at those schools that were thought to be in likely 'dangerous' locations.

Manpower was controlled; staffing was restricted. The American Army had taken over the Moorooka Convent School, so 'Ipswich Road' shared its facilities with the children from Moorooka—Ipswich Road children went to school in the mornings and Moorooka children in the afternoons. Some school communities were evacuated to country areas in the early days of the Pacific war. There were thousands of school children evacuated from Brisbane early in 1942.

The School Register is now on computer, but I have only oral access to this. However, it must have been started only in recent years because the latest registration number is 2018 in September 2011. Consequently, I have not been able to establish how many children have attended Mary Immaculate Primary School.

The school archives hold some interesting references to earlier pupils. There is a *Catholic Leader* article dated April 17, 1988, referring to Sr Margaret Mary of the Carmelite Order:

For Sister Margaret, A Crown of Roses

Sister Margaret Mary Freney, one of four daughters of an Annerley family to become a Religious received a Crown of Roses, to mark the Golden Jubilee of her profession as an Enclosed Carmelite. The roses were placed on her head by Mother Catherine of the Ormiston Carmel during a Jubilee Mass celebrated by twelve priests. The principal celebrant was Marist Father, Walter Fingleton, Parish Priest at Taralga, New South Wales, who said he had come to acknowledge his debt to Sister Margaret Mary. When entering the Marists, he asked for Prayers for his vocation, and Sr Margaret Mary had responded and had continued to pray for him ever since.

Sister Margaret's three other sisters who are mentioned in the article. Ursula, Joyce and Doreen, became Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Margaret Mary died in 2010. When Margaret Mary left the Parish to enter the Carmelites, she left her Scholarship medals with Fr James D Kelly PP. Her Mementos were in the Parish Archives when I last saw them fifteen years ago. There is another press clipping on file, regarding the Hutchinson Family:

Family's Success in Scholarships

A Queensland record possibly has been established by Grace Hutchinson's name appearing amongst the successful candidates in yesterday's scholarship results, for her 8 brothers passed the scholarship examination from Ipswich Road Convent, where she is a pupil. Seven of her brothers have seen service with the forces. One of them has given his life. They are:

Captain T C Hutchinson	AIF
Sergeant R G Hutchinson	AIF
Corporal J A Hutchinson	AIF
Corporal K M Hutchinson	AIF
Corporal T J Hutchinson*	AIF
Gunner S P Hutchinson	VDC
LAC W W Hutchinson	RAAF

*Deceased

I know that the eighth brother, Mel Hutchinson, couldn't have been in the forces at that time because he had only completed his scholarship exam in 1941. So at the time of this newspaper article, Mel would have been about 14 years old—too young to join his brothers in the services. Their father worked on the Somerset Dam site in the 1930s.

There is a press photo of the successful pupils from St Joseph's School, Ipswich Road Annerley 1935. The caption & storyline read:

At the recent Scholarship examinations thirteen pupils presented themselves and all were successful; many of them obtaining creditable percentages, the highest being 81.6 percent. The pupils were Betty Leavy, Ursula Freney, Mavis Silcock, Beryl Kerrigan, Maureen Kennedy, Maude Anderson, Vincent O'Dwyer, Tom Busted, Peter McLean, Jack Rochford, Paul McLean, Dick O'Shanesy and Harry Turley. Molly Witham, right end top row, tied for third place with grade D honours Christian Doctrine examination, and Tom Busted obtained the highest percentage in the A paper Grade D.

Ursula Freney now lives at St Pauls Hostel, Bardonia. I see Sr Ursula from time-to-time throughout the year. Ursula Freney's father, Walter, was part of the delegation of three, who approached the Archbishop in 1912 to ask for a church and school to be formed at Ipswich Road.

Molly (Witham) Carroll died just a few years ago in the Parish where she had spent her life. Molly (Mary), her daughter Judith and her granddaughter Karen were mentioned in the paper concerning Loreto College, presented to us here in August 2010 by Sr Helen Salter ibvm and Mrs Moya Hickey.

It is difficult to determine the changes of name of the primary school over the years. I do not know what it was called when the Sacred Heart Sisters started it in 1917. In my era, it was known as St Joseph's Convent, Ipswich Road. In fact, the parish was known as Ipswich Road Parish. Perhaps in 1954 the name started to change to Mary Immaculate School, because in that year the foundation stone of the brick school was blessed and laid. The new building of Mary Immaculate School was opened in July 1955.

The Convent school was subject to inspection by the Department of Public Instruction. I have read several of the later Inspectors' Reports. They record the name of the school from 1956 to 1962 as "Convent School at Ipswich Road". From 1969 it appears to be called Mary Immaculate School at Annerley.

The earliest Inspector's report on file was made by Mr Michael J Portley, a second cousin of my father-in-law, James Portley, and his brother, Father "Joe" (Michael Joseph) Portley, who was Parish Priest at Tannymorel and Killarney in 1942. Fr Joe served in the Toowoomba Diocese, dying at Mitchell Parish.

"Mitch" Portley, as he was affectionately known to the State School teachers in the *Fifties*, inspected the school for five consecutive years. His handwritten report reads:

Report of the Inspection of the Convent School
at Ipswich Road at Brisbane; Inspected 17 to 22 May 1956.

Present 235 Boys 290 Girls Total 525 Pupils

1. Records:- are neatly posted. When tested they were found accurate and up to date...
2. The Government of the school is firm, wise and sympathetic. Pupils are courteous, industrious and co-operative.
3. Organisation:- is thoroughly organised; every phase of schooling has been carefully planned to secure maximum efficiency
4. Methods:- Methods observed were intelligent, progressive and were applied with skill and vigour.
1. Proficiency and progress of pupils:- Reading and recitation were very good throughout...

Mr Portley also recorded that 'the piano is out of tune'.

The number of pupils gradually reduced over the years. The population of Tarragindi, Ekibin and Wellers Hill increased rapidly in the post-war building boom, and the opening of the school at St Elizabeth's in 1958, allowed many children to attend school there, with the Presentation Sisters.

ANNUAL ENROLMENTS

YEAR	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
1958	228	290	525
1959	200	226	426
1960	202	256	458
1961	1998	236	434
1962	183	219	402
1963	168	202	370
1964	157.	165	322
1966	139	167	306
1967	113	167	280
1969	99	181	280
1974	78	162	240
1977			194

The enrolment at Mary Immaculate School in 2011 is now effectively 148 children, with an average attendance of 140. This includes those in the pre-school.

Other Inspections were performed by: A V Hendy, K J O'Sullivan, Norman E T Pyle, A H Biddle and D P Eastment.

In each of their reports dating from 1956 to 1977, the Inspectors recorded in their General Comments and/or Summation: 'It was a pleasure to inspect this school.'

In 1961 when Mr and Mrs Oswald Florher died, their home on the city side of the convent, was bequeathed to the Sisters of Saint Joseph, with whom they had been friendly since 1920. Their home was used to accommodate some of those younger Sisters of Saint Joseph who were continuing their tertiary studies.

Monsignor J D Kelly, in his Golden Jubilee year, foresaw that with the introduction of the Radford Scheme in Queensland Education, it would not be possible for the established colleges in the archdiocese to accommodate all the Grade 8 year students into their systems. He therefore pressed on with his wish to establish a girls' secondary school in the parish.

I have seen a copy of the letter from Archbishop James Duhig to Monsignor Kelly dated 23 May 1963. It reads:

Dear Monsignor Kelly,

I have pleasure in granting permission for the opening of a Girls' Secondary School in your Parish of Annerley. Will you please negotiate with the Sisters of St Joseph and have their assurance that they can supply the necessary Teachers. If they can do so, I would like to see the school opened as early as possible.

Very sincerely, yours in Christ.

Archbishop of Brisbane.

In May 1963, the Parish purchased the Riding family home at 15 Chester Road—Our Lady's College was under way. In February 1964, Our Lady's College opened with 78 students in years 8 and 9. Sr Romuald was Principal with Sr Lucy as her deputy. Together they taught all the available subjects. Later in the year, Sr Martin came to teach Home Economics. Sr Romuald stayed at the helm for 8 years then handed the reins to her deputy, Sr Lucy Tierney, who continued until her transfer to the Rockhampton Diocese. In 1974 Sr Paul took command, and in that year enrolments peaked at 473.

In 2011 there are still more than 400 students. By the beginning of 1969 the school consisted of four main buildings. The 1970s were years of great expansion.

In 1976 the college was handed over to the Brisbane Catholic Education Office. The first lay principal was Miss Joan Gallagher (for 13 years); Sr Paul stayed on as APRE for two years to assist transition to Catholic Education requirements. Mrs Faye Conley followed Miss Joan Gallagher in 1989—in their Silver Anniversary year. Mrs Laura Keating was Principal in the 1990s before going to Clairvaux-MacKillop College at Upper Mt Gravatt. The present Principal is Mrs Claire McLaren, who has been appointed Foundation Principal of the Catholic Secondary School at Mango Hill, to open in 2013.

The great strength of Our Lady's College is the multiculturalism. Whilst the early students were of Anglo-Irish, Italian, Greek and Lebanese extraction, the years saw a big increase of families from Central and South America, the Indian sub-continent, Vietnam and the Pacific, and Africa, as well as students from our own indigenous groups. The college was described a decade ago as a mini United Nations. The richness is reflected in the broadness of horizons: national customs, costumes, food, dance, language and music.

A new convent for sixteen sisters was built in Ferndale Street near the church and opened in 1970. In 1994 extension renovations were made and the convent now operates as the Mary MacKillop Centre managed by three resident sisters.

The Josephite Sisters continued to serve the primary school until 1990 and the last four Religious School Principals were:-

- Sr M Bernadette in June 1976
- Sr Carmel Mary from 1977-1979
- Sr Brenda from 1980-1987
- Sr Genevieve from 1988-1990

In 1991 the first lay principal, Mrs Margaret Gallan was appointed. She was followed by Mr Ric Sheehan and then the present principal, Mrs Helen Camden.

After the sisters moved into the new convent in 1970, the old convent which was being used by the Parish as a general storage facility, fell into disrepair as did the old church. Both buildings were eventually dismantled and MaryMac Community Centre was constructed on the site as the “living room of the parish”. It was blessed and opened in October 1978 and is in frequent use for school purposes. The main hall is used for school assemblies as well as parish life and is available for Diocesan use and for the local community, including more than thirty national groups.

There were numerous celebrations in 1992, when anyone and everyone who had ever been a parishioner of Mary Immaculate, Ipswich Road, Annerley, responded to an invitation to ‘Come Home to Mary Immaculate’. School class groups from across the decades, met one Sunday each month for three months—May, June and July—to renew friendships that went back seventy-five years. In August, the whole community came together for a special Mass and Dinner to mark 75 years of the foundation of the school and 60 years of the brick church.

In 2004 the school systems reverted to what I experienced as a new boy in 1934. A pre-school opened in premises built on one of the original tennis courts. It is just a few paces from where I sat in my first school room under the old 1914 wooden church.

In 2007 we celebrated 90 years of the school. The day was well attended. Sr Ursula Freney was able to be with us on that day as a child of one of the original committeemen of the parish, Walter Robert Freney. Sister unveiled a plaque to commemorate Mother Mary Zahel, the artist who, in 1918, painted the picture of Mary Immaculate. I understand that Mother Zahel did not sign her paintings, so it was 90 years before

she was formally acknowledged. On that occasion, Peter Vallely, the son of the schoolgirl, Rita de Lange, whose face was that painted by Mother Zahel, was unable to attend—just 24 hours beforehand, he had to travel overseas on business.

Most recently a B.E.R. building, the Multi-purpose Sports Area, *Cooinda* (Happy Place) was blessed and opened on 13 September 2010.

This is not “The End”. We live in these years—which will be History sometime in the future—and the story will continue to unfold and grow in years ahead.

Brian Matthews was born in the Mary Immaculate Parish, Annerley. He attended St Josephs Convent School, Annerley from 1934 to 1941, before attending St Laurence’s CBC at South Brisbane.

After passing the Junior University examinations, he attended the Teachers Training College for two years before serving in several State Schools in Queensland for nearly five years.

Brian joined the general insurance industry where he served several international and national companies for the next forty years, before his retirement.

He has always been interested in “how things happened” which influence “why we do things the way we do today”. Brian has taken a particular interest in the formation and development of the Annerley Parish.